

**Washington, DC**-Congressman **Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23)** today touted the passage of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill in the House of Representatives which includes over \$5.6 million he secured for facilities at Camp Bullis in San Antonio and Laughlin Airforce Base in Del Rio. Overall this bill totals \$72.7 billion in spending and includes full funding for BRAC in fiscal year 2009. The bill passed the House by a large bipartisan vote of 409 to 4. The bill now awaits passage in the Senate.

“This week I held a meeting with the Secretary of the VA and we discussed many important issues in this piece of legislation,” said **Congressman Rodriguez (TX-23)**. “Funding BRAC additions and substantive VA programs to San Antonio and elsewhere in my district has been one of my top priorities because the investments in infrastructure, medical training and health care will play an important role in our community and our military for many years to come.

This bill provides \$24.8 billion for Military Construction, Family Housing and BRAC. In addition to fully funding BRAC, the bill provides for the modernization of training facilities, as well as the building of child care centers, barracks, and homes. It ensures that our active forces will have a better environment in which to train and operate, as well as an improved quality of life.

For San Antonio the bill provides **\$4.2 million** for a Live Fire Exercise Shoothouse at Camp Bullis in San Antonio which will allow for the construction of a standard design live fire exercise shoothouse. This project allows for soldiers and units to attain and maintain the greatest proficiency for live fire training in urban environments, training which many of our troops require in order to be the most prepared for service in Iraq or Afghanistan. This project will enhance the value of Camp Bullis to the Department of Defense and enhance the Joint Land Use Study for which Congressman Rodriguez serves as a member of the Advisory Committee.

For Del Rio the bill provides **\$1.44 million** for design and planning a Student Officer Quarters at Laughlin Air Force Base. □ Unaccompanied

Officer Quarters space to house student pilots is a high priority for Laughlin AFB. Currently there is an inadequate amount of space available to house student pilots.

"As a result of BRAC, the San Antonio area economy will continue to make great progress, our country will benefit from the talented professionals that will be trained here, and our military men and women will have the high quality healthcare and support they have earned and deserve," continued Rodriguez. This bill also provides many of the resources that would give the tools to our local officials to prevent encroachment from stopping the great leaps we've made."

The bill also provides an additional \$11 million for the Office of Inspector General to restore the cut that was made to this budget in the President's request and to provide additional personnel to inspect the community based outpatient clinics and Vet Centers. This funding is directly in response to the lack of oversight that has lead to recent tragedies and mistakes at VA facilities in San Antonio, El Paso, and elsewhere throughout the country.

This bill includes additional funds to build on a quality of life initiative for our servicemen and women that began with the fiscal year 2008 supplemental bill. First, included in the bill is nearly \$200 million in additional troop housing for Army and Marine Corps trainees.

An additional \$136 million for medical facilities is included in the bill as well. There is a huge unmet need for recapitalizing medical treatment facilities, many of which are old and do not meet current standards for care.

This bill provides \$47.7 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This is \$2.9 billion more than the President's request and \$4.6 billion more than fiscal year 2008. Within this funding increase, the Veterans Benefits Administration would be provided with the resources to hire 1,400 new claims processors in addition to the 703 additional personnel that were included in the budget submission.

This increase would also provide for an additional \$1.6 billion for the Veterans Health Administration. These funds will allow the Department to increase access to services, ensure safer facilities and improve treatment including:

- \$568 million to increase enrollment of Priority 8 veterans by 10 percent;
- \$300 million to address the backlog in non-recurring maintenance at our medical facilities;

- \$200 million to increase access to fee-based care for veterans in areas where the Department does not offer services;
- \$116 million more to increase availability of new generation prosthetics;
- \$58 million to restore the cut taken by the Department for medical research in trauma, mental health and other areas that are critical to finding the best treatments for our OEF/OIF veterans, and to increase funding for research in areas that are most important to the veteran population;
- \$50 million more to increase the beneficiary travel reimbursement rate from 28.5 cents to 35 cents;
- \$40 million more to provide the additional case workers and medical services needed for our homeless veterans;

This bill also ensures that the VA will spend no less than \$3.8 billion on specialty mental health services and \$584 million on Substance Abuse programs. Additionally, language has been included to increase our oversight in this critical area to ensure that the VA is able to provide the best care both now, and in the future, for our veterans who need care for mental illness, PTSD, substance abuse, suicide prevention, and military sexual trauma.

This bill increases VA construction by \$1.1 billion which will provide the needed funding for 6 additional major construction projects and the additional 145 minor construction projects that can be completed in fiscal year 2009. By accelerating this construction program, we are able to increase services to our veterans and avoid additional cost increases due to construction inflation.